Abstract

Consumers express electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in the form of ratings and reviews on products, services, and experiences online. The phenomenon to review and rate services online third-party platforms has disseminated from the private to the public sector domain. eWOM about many public organizations can be found on review platforms such as Yelp or Google Profiles. Here, citizens can create their eWOM in reviews and ratings and are also exposed to other citizens' eWOM. Still, the concept of eWOM and its management is primarily regarded from a public sector perspective leaving a research gap on public organizations' perspectives and handling of eWOM.

This thesis adds to closing that gap by investigating s the handling and management of eWOM of public organizations. It aims at providing insights on how eWOM is managed in the public sector and which motivation, opportunities, and abilities exist in public organizations to manage eWOM. To guide the research, the thesis applies a motivation, opportunity, and abilities (MOA) framework to three stages of the eWOM process (eWOM creation, eWOM exposure, and eWOM evaluation). For the data collection, experts from ten public organizations in the city-state of Hamburg were interviewed about the organizations' motivations, opportunities, and abilities to manage eWOM. The results are then presented according to the research framework and the eWOM process and discussed in the context of existing research on eWOM management in the public sector. The research shows that in the interviewed organizations, eWOM is primarily associated with the management of Google Profiles. However, the interest to engage in eWOM management is also linked to the public organizations' tasks. The primary motivation to engage in eWOM management seems to ensure data accuracy and prevent misleading information online and potentially harmful incidents to the organizations' reputation.

The results indicate that eWOM management occurs during eWOM creation and eWOM exposure but is still not fully applied in the stage of eWOM evaluation. In all three stages of the process, the ability to manage eWOM is restricted by a lack of human, monetary and timely resources within the organizations. Here dedication staff and permanent position to eWOM management could be a solution.